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## Kissinger: Seeking a Consensus

*Henry Kissinger was back in Washington last week sorting out the agenda for his new bipartisan commission on Central America. Shortly after his preliminary meetings with Ronald Reagan and George Shultz, Kissinger talked with NEWSWEEK'S Henry W. Hubbard about his new job. Excerpts:*

**On his appointment:** On July 9, Judge Clark called me up and said he would like to put forward my name to the president as chairman of a commission on Central America and how would I feel about that? I told him it was virtually impossible, and I hoped he wouldn't put me in a position where I would have to turn down the president... that it was an area in which I was relatively less familiar and that I didn't know whether a commission was the way to go at it. I also said I had so many other things to do. Those were the main points. The following Tuesday I was at a dinner with United Nations Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick, and she urged me very strongly to take it. I told her that I was reluctant. [On Wednesday] I had lunch with Shultz, arranged weeks beforehand. The conversation covered the waterfront, and at the end of it we discussed the Central American commission. He indicated some interest in it, but also that he understood my doubts about it.

[Later that day, at a meeting with Clark.] I told him that while I almost certainly could not take it there were a number of prerequisites for the commission. One, it had to be physically located in the State Department to make it clear that there was State Department pre-eminence; two, that the executive director should be a Foreign Service officer so there would be a flow of communication and no implication of a separate commission foreign policy. And third, I thought it was absolutely essential that the secretary of state not be just acquiescent but enthusiastic. This didn't have anything to do with me at that point. I was turning it down. These were not conditions. This was what I thought was required for an effective commission.

During the course of Saturday I decided I definitely would not do it. I called Clark to tell him. But... he said he had just achieved the concurrence—the enthusiastic support—of everybody: Casey, Weinberger, Shultz, Jeane Kirkpatrick, the president.... He asked me to think about it overnight. On Sunday three things happened. [AFL-CIO president Lane] Kirkland made his participation conditional on my chairmanship. Shultz called me at great length to urge me to take it. He used

the rather subtle argument that as a friend he really had no right to ask me to undertake such a chore, but that as secretary of state he thought there was a great need.... About 6 o'clock, the president called. He said he had no second choice and urged me to accept. If you have been secretary of state, you really feel you have no right to tell the president that his conception of the need does not override yours. So I accepted.

**On the commission's policies:** My impression is that the president and secretary of state think that with luck it would do what the [social security and MX] commissions did. I do not believe it lends itself to quite the same treatment because the other two commissions were working for a specific legislative deadline and dealt with a specific numerical content. This is a much broader field, and it does not point to any one decision; it will involve a series of decisions over a long period of time.

I believe it is in the overwhelming national interest not to have Central America turn into a major political issue—and this has been my theme when I called every member of the commission. It seems to me desirable to take Central America out of politics, whoever wins the election. Even if there is a change in administrations, a new president might well be grateful to have a bipartisan group on whose report he can rely so that he doesn't start immediately with a huge controversy. I think we really cannot afford, if we can avoid it, another searing debate like we had 10 years ago,

and this time about an area that is on our doorstep.

**On his understandings with Reagan:** Look, when you undertake a presidential assignment you cannot make a treaty with the president.... I had a long talk with Secretary Shultz Monday evening, and that morning a briefer but very satisfactory and cordial talk with the president. Neither imposed restrictions, neither said, "We hope you stick to our policy framework." Nobody said to me, "Look, by the time you

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